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The Editors

STUDIES IN SUPERSTITION:

HORACE

In Three Parts—Part I

The superstitions mentioned in Horace were first catalogued by Mr G L Apperson in the Folk Lore Journal of the English Folk Lore Society, vol I. However, when in the course of my researches in this field I came to read the Latin Lyric, I soon found it necessary to make a new collection. For Apperson had attacked the problem from the standpoint of the folklorist and not from that of the mythologist. The following collection, therefore, contains a number of items not given by my predecessor, and on the other hand omits a considerable number of points mentioned there, especially those belonging to the field of religion proper, or to that of popular games and medicine.

In approaching an author of the standing of Horace the task of critical selection, always difficult, becomes doubly so on account of the mental attitude of the *man*. In dealing with authors like Aeschylus, Sophocles, even Euripides, one feels that one is confronted by an earnestness of purpose, a sincerity of religious feeling, which make every little notice gleaned from their works appear a valuable gem. The same holds good of the intense fervor of Pindar. Even Theocritus, though his time and age would seem to bear a rather close re-

semblance to those of the Roman poet, occupies a different place. For, although a courtier poet, he yet addresses himself to a national audience. But Horace lived not only at the court of the ruler of the world, at least he *seems* to be a different person at different times. It appears difficult, at first, to reconcile the poet of the Roman Odes in the third book of the Carmina, with their advocacy of a return to the severe "*disciplina maiorum*", with the man who could utter such sentiments as "*carpe diem*" or advocate the mere sensual enjoyment of the hour as the aim to be striven after. And yet the reader of the whole work of Horace cannot but feel that he is dealing with a whole man of firm moral and ethical principles. It behooves us therefore, before giving our catalog, to justify our selection by a short resumé of the attitude of the poet to the question of religion.

The reader will at once think of the famous Ode of the Recantation (I, 34) "*Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens, Insanientis dum sapientiae Consultus erro, nunc retrorsum Vela dare atque iterare cursus Cogor relictos*". Here Horace bids farewell to the wisdom of Epicure, and seems to vow a return to the religion of the forefathers. A thunderbolt from the clear sky, so he says, has given him warning that the gods humble the mighty and exalt the humble. But was he quite serious and sincere? "*Hinc apicem rapax Fortuna cum stridore acuto Sustulit, hic posuisse gaudet*"; so he continues, with a reference to Fate which reminds one much more of the sombre attitude of a Tacitus. Of course, the advocate of the poet can quote more than one passage, which may be construed as bearing out this frame of mind. But I am convinced that a careful weighing in the balance will show that in all of these the opinions uttered are spoken much more in deference to the outspoken policy of Caesar Augustus than from the poet's own heart. Fortunately, Horace himself has allowed us more than one glance into his own convictions. In the third Satire of the second Book, 288 ff he tells us

a story of a mother, who, in order to cure her son of the fever, would be willing to imperil his health by an immersion in the ice cold water of the Tiber in accordance with some, presumably Jewish rite. "*Quone malo mentem concussa? Timore deorum*". In deference to truth it must be said that the expression "*timore deorum*" seems to be a translation of the Greek *Deisidaimonia*. And in the same poem (79) he classes the "*tristis superstitio*" with the "*mentis morbi*". The same attitude, with a clear and distinct reference to the Epicurean philosophy, has found its expression in the fifth satire of the first book, where he ridicules the alleged miracle of Gnatia with these words: I have learned that the gods lead a life free from care. If Nature does anything miraculous, it does not mean that the gods, in their displeasure, cause this phenomenon". If it can be urged against these conclusions that the poems mentioned were written 12 and 7 years before the recantation, the same cannot be said of Epist II, 2 207 ff. And yet here the poet assumes clearly the role of the free thinker. For these are his words: "Is your heart free of fear of, and resentment at, death? Do you laugh at dreams, magical terrors, miracles, witches, the spectres of night, and the portents of the Thessalians?" The man who could pen these words in the midst of a civilisation infested by all the superstitions of the East cannot have been deeply imbued with respect for the primitive religion of his forefathers, a religion which certainly was full of portents and their expiation. Rather, we may imagine him as of the same mental attitude as Cicero, viz, while himself absolutely free from all beliefs except perhaps a philosophical Deism, yet favoring the maintenance of the strict observance of the traditional forms of worship on account of its restraining influence upon the unbridled instincts of the populace.

The question naturally arises: What value can there be in the items of superstition gleaned from the works of such a man? In the first instance, we may well believe in the actual existence, in his time, of those superstitions which he ridicules in his Satires. There is one great difference between the satire of Horace and that of Juvenal or Persius. The element of exaggeration is conspicuously absent. Not only was his age not yet infected with the insane desire to say something new, which characterizes the beginning of the second century of our era as it is the earmark of every age of the Epigone, but the very

character of the poet was averse to overstatements. The *aurea mediocritas* was for him much more than a mere form of speech; it was deeply ingrained, both by nature and by education, in his innermost heart. And so we may accept without reserve as actually existing every superstition which is mentioned in the Sermones.

As for the Odes, his more serious poems without doubt were written with the honest endeavor to support the moral restoration which the Augustan Court — with scant success — tried to bring about.

It is somewhat different with such of his poems as are written in a lighter vein. These present at once the very important question as to how far they may be taken to represent Roman feelings, or whether they are not rather a close imitation of Greek originals, including the local color. The very elusive character of all superstitions, cropping up as they do alike in every land, presents one of the most delicate problems of research in the field of religious history. Time and again have even the greatest scholars in the field of folklore been misled, and have given as popular beliefs matters which are purely a remnant of learned tradition. Even Felix Liebrecht in his priceless *Volkskunde* once reported as an actual Norwegian superstition what is palpably simply a translation of a notice found in Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*. Nobody doubts that Vergil's eighth eclogue does not give a picture of an occurrence in Rome, or even in Italy. Theocritus himself cannot have pictured in his second Idyl an actual happening at Alexandria or Syracuse. And yet, how wary we ought to tread on this ground was conclusively proven by the publication and the detailed study of the "Magical Papyri" during the last decade of the past century. I myself have shown (Rhein Museum XLIX) that nearly every feature of the Canidia Poems of Horace finds its close parallel in these sorcerers' handbooks of a much later period. The discussion of these problems must be reserved to the introduction into a History of Ancient Superstition, which after all may yet be written within our generation. My immediate purpose in this publication, as in my preceding studies, is rather to pave the way for such a work, and to collect the material for it. Some points, however, may fitly be discussed, as opportunity offers, in connection with the catalog of superstitions annexed to this paper.

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